

INSULATED FOOD CONTAINER

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1 INSULATED FOOD CONTAINER

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4 Field of the Invention

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6 This invention relates to food storage devices and,
7 more particularly, to containers for keeping food warm and
8 moist.

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10 Background of the Invention

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12 Most people enjoy eating warm tortillas, bread, rolls,
13 cookies and other savory and sweet breads and bread-like
14 foods. However, if freshly baked or warmed food such as
15 these are left out, they quickly dry out and become cold.
16 In an attempt to keep warm and moist freshly baked and
17 warmed breads and bread-like foods, most people store them
18 in sealed containers such as plastic bags and plastic
19 containers with tight-fitting lids. However, freshly baked
20 or heated bread and bread-like food gives off moisture in
21 the form of water vapor, which invariable builds up in
22 sealed containers and makes them soggy and unpalatable.
23 Given the lack of containers that are constructed to keep
24 food warm and moist, there is a need for such a container
25 that is easy to use and construct and that keeps food warm

1 and moist without allowing it to become soggy over an
2 extended period of time.

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1 Summary of the Invention

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3 The above problems and others are at least partially
4 solved and the above purposes and others realized in new and
5 improved apparatus for storing food and for keeping it warm
6 and moist. In a preferred embodiment, the apparatus of the
7 invention comprises a substantial pouch that bounds an
8 insulated and substantially water impermeable food-warming
9 chamber. The pouch includes opposing substantially
10 coextensive lips capable of being moved apart for providing
11 food passage to the warming chamber and for providing a
12 partial vapor lock for the warming chamber. When warm food
13 is placed into the warming chamber, it is kept warm. Warm
14 food, such as warm tortillas and sweet and savory bread and
15 bread-like food give off water vapor. The partial vapor
16 lock allows water vapor to pass between the lips, which
17 inhibits moisture from building up in the warming chamber
18 and the food stored therein from becoming soggy. Because
19 the vapor lock is only partial, it also ensures that the
20 food stored in the warming chamber remains moist.

21
22 The warming chamber is insulated with insulating
23 structure. In one embodiment, the insulating structure
24 comprises a substantial pouch formed of joined superimposed
25 layers of cloth and insulating material. In another

1 embodiment, the insulating structure comprises opposing and
2 partially joined insulators each comprising joined
3 superimposed layers of cloth and insulating material. A
4 closure is provided for actively and partially coupling
5 together the lips. The closure comprises an engagement
6 element supported by one of the lips and an opposing and
7 detachably engagable complemental engagement element
8 supported by the other of the lips.

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10 Consistent with the foregoing, the invention also
11 contemplates associated methods.

1 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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3 Referring to the drawings:

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5 Fig. 1 is a perspective view of apparatus for keeping
6 food warm and moist;

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8 Fig. 2 is a top view of the apparatus of Fig. 1;

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10 Fig. 3 is a side view of the apparatus of Fig. 1;

11

12 Fig. 4 is a top view of the apparatus of Fig. 1 shown
13 as it would appear equipped with indicia;

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15 Fig. 5 is an enlarged fragmented perspective view of a
16 closure for an opening of the apparatus of Fig. 1; and

17

18 Fig. 6 is a sectional view along line 6-6 of Fig. 1.

1 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

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3 Referring to the drawings, Fig. 1 is a perspective view
4 of apparatus 10 for storing food and for keeping it warm and
5 moist without letting it get soggy, in accordance with the
6 invention. Looking to Fig. 6, which illustrates a sectional
7 view along line 6-6 of Fig. 1, apparatus 10 is comprised of
8 a substantial pouch 11 and insulating structure 12 that are
9 together pliant and easily manipulated by hand and washable.

10 In terms of this disclosure, the term "pouch" is given its
11 ordinary and customary structural meaning. In this regard,

12 pouch 11 is a general bag or baglike item comprising a
13 substantially continuous sidewall 13 that includes a closed
14 end and an opposing open end (not shown in Fig. 6, but is
15 contained substantially by insulating structure 12) and a
16 chamber 14 therebetween for receiving and accommodating food
17 that, in this specific example, is shown as tortillas 15 as
18 a matter of example. Insulating structure 12 supports and
19 substantially encloses pouch 11, and pouch 11 is constructed
20 of a substantially water-impermeable material such as thin
21 plastic or polyester film or the like. As a matter of
22 explanation and detail, sidewall 13 is more specifically
23 comprised of opposing, spaced-apart layers 13A and 13B that
24 meet at a continuous edge 13C.

Referring back to Fig. 1, insulating structure 12 is generally circular, which is preferably also the case with pouch 11. Other shapes may be employed whether ovoidal, triangular, square, etc., and insulating structure 12 and pouch 11 may be of different shapes. Insulating structure 12 is comprised of a substantial pouch that, in this specific embodiment, is defined by joined substantially coextensive elements or insulators 20 and 21 and it alternatively may be formed from or of a single element. In this preferred embodiment, elements 20 and 21 are joined at their respective distal extremities and this will be discussed more fully later in this specification, and are substantially identical and only one will be discussed in connection with Fig. 6. In this regard, element 20 is comprised of insulation or insulating material 22 contained substantially in a substantial shell 23. Insulation 22 is constructed of natural and/or synthetic insulating material such as polyester and/or cotton or other suitable insulating material or combination of materials and may be constructed of any suitable thickness for providing a desired insulating ability. Shell 23 includes opposing, spaced-apart layers 23A and 23B that meet at a substantially continuous edge 23C. Shell 23 is preferably constructed of a natural and/or synthetic, woven and/or unwoven cloth or cloth-like material. Layers 23A and 23B and insulation 22 are

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1 considered engaged or otherwise joined, superimposed layers,
2 A and layer 23B directly opposes and is substantially
3 coextensive with layer 13A of pouch 11 and this can be
4 reversed. In another embodiment, the inner surface of layer
5 13A that faces and at least partially defines chamber 14 may
6 be equipped or otherwise associated with a cloth or cloth-
7 like layer. Layers 23A and 23B are joined with an adhesive
8 and/or with sewn features 24 as shown for the purposes of
9 example, and edge 23C is reinforced with a continuous bead
10 25, which prevents the free edges of layers 23A and 23B from
11 fraying and this may be accomplished in other ways such as
12 with sewn reinforcements, glue, etc. In another embodiment,
13 bead 25 may comprise the structure for engaging the free
14 edges of layers 23A and 23B together. Given that element 21
15 is substantially identical to element 20, element 21 is
16 denoted with the same reference numerals used to describe
17 element 20 and they are each accompanied with a prime ("')
18 symbol for clarity. Edges 23C and 23C' substantially oppose
19 each other and define generally the opposing and
20 substantially continuous distal extremities of elements 20
21 and 21, respectively. In Fig. 1, the substantially
22 continuous distal extremity of element 20 is denoted
23 generally at 26, and the opposing and substantially
24 continuous distal extremity of element 21 is denoted
25 generally at 27.

1 Pouch 11 may be prefabricated, and elements 20 and 21
2 may be prefabricated and then joined together and to pouch
3 11. In another embodiment, element 20 may be prefabricated
4 with layer 13A and element 21 may be prefabricated with
5 layer 13B. These prefabricated structures may then be
6 joined together for forming apparatus 10 including pouch 11.
7 Elements 20 and 21 are joined together with a suitable
8 adhesive and/or sewn features, which may comprise sewn
9 features 24 discussed in connection with Fig. 6 and which
10 are also shown in Fig. 1 or different sewn features.

11

12 In a further and more specific aspect in regards to
13 Fig. 1, elements 20 and 21 are joined together substantially
14 at and along only a portion of extremities 26 and 27. This
15 leaves other portions of the extremities 26 and 27 free, and
16 these free portions of extremities 26 and 27 define opposing
17 and substantially coextensive lips 30 and 31, respectively.
18 Lips 30 and 31 loosely associate or otherwise mingle with
19 one another and are capable of being easily pulled apart for
20 forming an opening 35, which leads to chamber 14 (chamber 14
21 shown only in Fig. 6). Food passage to chamber 14 may also
22 be provided by another sealable opening of apparatus 10 if
23 desired.

1 The open end of pouch 11 is formed by opposing and
2 substantially coextensive lips of sidewall 13, which are
3 each preferably engaged to one of elements 20 and 21 by
4 adhesive or sewing or the like. The lips of sidewall 13 are
5 preferably substantially coextensive with and positioned
6 substantially along lips 30 and 31. As a result, the open
7 end of pouch 11 is directed toward and otherwise generally
8 common with lips 30 and 31 and opening 35 defined thereby.

9 In this regard, the open end of pouch 11 and opening 35
10 defined by lips 30 and 31 generally define the open end of
11 apparatus 10, which is denoted generally in Fig. 1 with the
12 reference character 40. The lips that define the open end
13 of pouch 11 can be shallow of lips 30 and 31 if desired.
14 Lips 30 and 31 are constructed and arranged so that they
15 normally loosely associate or mingle with one another or
16 otherwise rest against one another passively. By pulling
17 elements 20 and 21 apart at lips 30 and 31, opening 35 may
18 be enlarged for allowing a user to pass food therethrough
19 and into chamber 14.

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21 In operation, a user may take warm food such as warm
22 tortillas, bread, rolls or other savory or sweet bread or
23 bread-like food, pull lips 30 and 31 apart and pass the food
24 into chamber 14 through opening 35 and through the open end
25 of pouch 11. By releasing lips 30 and 31, they naturally

1 come together and rest against one another as generally
2 shown in Fig. 3. Insulating structure 12 keeps the food
3 contained in chamber 14 warm. Because the engagement
4 between lips 30 and 31 is a non-sealing engagement, and
5 because pouch 11 is open, water vapor generated by the warm
6 food is able to pass from pouch 11 and outwardly *between*
7 opening 35 between lips 30 and 31 as it builds up in chamber
8 14. In this regard, opening 35 is never completely sealed
9 and this provides a partial vapor lock for chamber 14. This
10 partial vapor lock inhibits moisture from building up in
11 chamber 14 for inhibiting the food contained therein from
12 becoming soggy, yet allows enough moisture vapor to remain
13 therein for keeping the food moist.

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15 As a matter of convenience, lips may be partially and
16 mechanically or actively closed at a discrete point with a
17 closure 50 shown generally in Figs. 3 and 5. Closure 50 is
18 comprised of an engagement element 51 supported by or
19 otherwise fixed to or adjacent lip 30 and an opposing and
20 detachably engagable complemental engagement element 52
21 supported by or otherwise fixed to or adjacent lip 31. In a
22 preferred embodiment, engagement element 51 comprises one of
23 a hook medium and a loop medium commonly found under the
24 VELCRO trademark and complemental engagement element 52
25 comprises the other of the hook medium and the loop medium

1 and this may be reversed. Those of ordinary skill will
2 appreciate that lips 30 and 31 may employ a snap or button
3 fastener or other suitable form of closure. The ability to
4 actively or otherwise positively or mechanically fasten lips
5 30 and 31 together at a discrete point is helpful for
6 inhibiting the contents of chamber 14 from falling out
7 during transport. Depending on the size of apparatus 10,
8 lips 30 and 31 may be provided with closure structure for
9 fastening lips 30 and 31 together at spaced apart points,
10 while leaving other parts of lips 30 and 31 passively
11 engagable for allow water vapor to pass therethrough.
12 Apparatus 10 is microwave safe, so it may be used for
13 heating food in the microwave.

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15 The invention has been described above with reference
16 to one or more preferred embodiments. However, those
17 skilled in the art will recognize that changes and
18 modifications may be made in the described embodiments
19 without departing from the nature and scope of the
20 invention. For instance the outer surface of element 20 may
21 be equipped with indicia 55 as shown in Fig. 2, which may
22 comprise advertising indicia or, perhaps, use and care
23 instructions 55A as shown in Fig. 4 and element 21 may also
24 or alternatively be provided with this indicia. Various
25 changes and modifications to one or more of the embodiments

1 herein chosen for purposes of illustration will readily
2 occur to those skilled in the art. To the extent that such
3 modifications and variations do not depart from the spirit
4 of the invention, they are intended to be included within
5 the scope thereof, which is assessed only by a fair
6 interpretation of the following claims.

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8 Having fully described the invention in such clear and
9 concise terms as to enable those skilled in the art to
10 understand and practice the same, the invention claimed is:

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